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ABSTRACT

One of the goals of the America 2000 initiative is that by the year 2000, all children in the United States will start school ready to learn. Child care will play a major role in the achievement of this goal due to the fact that nearly half of all preschool children spend a significant portion of time in child care settings outside of the home. Diversity in child care settings is important, because the needs of families rarely fit neatly within the boundaries of any one program. Resource and referral agencies play a vital role in helping parents make informed choices from their many options. Responsibility for most child care programs in the Department of Health and Human Services rests with the Administration for Children and Families (ACF). ACF is directly responsible for: (1) child care assistance associated with job opportunities and basic skills training; (2) transitional child care for Aid to Families with Dependent Children recipients; (3) care that supports low-income working parents for at-risk children; (4) the Child Care and Development Block Grant; (5) social services block grants; (6) child welfare services that support state child care programs; (7) dependent care planning and development programs; and (8) Head Start. Through such programs, ACF helps families afford child care; helps increase the availability of child care; sets standards to ensure the health and safety of children in child care settings; and helps families make informed choices through consumer information and resource and referral efforts. (AC)

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REMARKS OF JO ANNE B. BARNHART

ASSISTANT SECRETARY

ADMINISTRATION FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

BEFORE THE

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF CHILD CARE RESOURCE

AND REFERRAL AGENCIES

FEBRUARY 20, 1992

WASHINGTON, D.C.

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I am pleased to be here today. To be among child care professionals from all over the country. Your conference theme -- Breaking Through: New Frontiers For Child Care acknowledges the fact that this is indeed new territory for families and the governments that serve them. I want to thank Nancy Kolben as President of NACCRRA for the pioneering work that child care resource and referral agencies are doing. They represent an important real-world link between parents and child care providers.

There is a growing need for resource and referral services across the country. And it reflects the changes that have occurred in society over the last 30 years. As a result of both economic pressures and career aspirations more and more mothers are in the workforce.

In 1960 less than 20% of married women with children under 6 earned an income. Today its over 60%. And although we don't have a lot of information about "Day Care" 20 years ago we know that the proportion of 3-4 year olds enrolled in preschool type programs nearly doubled between 1970 and 1990. So the role for child care resource and referral agencies is clear obviously and it will grow in the foreseeable future.

I'm impressed by the fact that as an association, NACCRRA has no vested interest in any one category of care or type of provider. Instead, you make it your business to know the full range of options available and their advantages and disadvantages. You help families understand alternatives available to them, including potential providers and types of available assistance. And you're really are in touch with families. Your perspective is personal professional and that's a valuable combination.

Nothing is more important to our nation's future than the health and well-being of our children. The school readiness goals set by president Bush and the nation's governors in the initiative America 2000 illustrate the emphasis that this Administration places on the development of our youngest citizens. The very first goal of America 2000 is to have all children in the U.S. Ready to learn when they start school by the year 2000.

Child care will play a major role in the achievement of this goal. The facts are simple: more American children than ever are being cared for outside of their own home by non-relatives. A recent study sponsored by the Department of Education, the Department of Health and Human Services and the Urban League shows that today, nearly half of all preschool children are involved in a child care setting outside of their home on a regular basis.

Last week President Bush and Secretary Sullivan spoke to a group of parents from around the country who had come at the invitation of the Surgeon General to discuss school readiness. One of the major concerns that these parents voiced was a general lack of awareness of the types of programs and resources that might be available to them. We need to do a better job of getting the word out to parents on exactly what is available. And resource and referral agencies provide a vital link in system.

The variety of child care settings available in this country reflects a diversity of cultural and personal priorities that is uniquely American. Our children are cared for by neighbors, relatives, churches, schools, and other private providers. This diversity provides a real world example of the "Freedom of Choice" we hold so dear. But uninformed choice is never desireable. So I thank you for your partnership in helping parents get to make good choices concerning the care for their children.

You recognize the importance of helping families to make the right child care choice for them from the many options they're faced with. In fact you help to protect parental choice by ensuring that choice is an informed choice.

Responsibility for most child care programs within the Department of Health and human services rests with the Administration for Children and Families, or ACF. Last spring Secretary Sullivan established ACF as the single agency within the department with comprehensive responsibility for federal programs directed at children and families. ACF brings together a broad spectrum of more than 60 different programs that target family needs. Our goal, put simply, is to improve the life prospects for children by supporting programs that help to strengthen families and promote self-sufficiency.

Having a diversity of programs is important, because the needs of families rarely fit neatly within the boundaries of any one program. The medical, social, and financial conditions of children and families are woven closely together much like individual fibers of a single fabric. Stress to the fabric affects all fibers, and proper care for the fabric must take all fibers into consideration.

As a single agency ACF will help us treat the problems of children and families together, as parts of a whole, rather than separate and unrelated. Already, we are working hard to coordinate the efforts of all our programs, to provide comprehensive assistance to families in need.

Child care is one component of the problems our families face and it affects more families every year. ACF is committed to helping states provide families with access to a range of affordable child care options. As you probably know, the programs we're directly responsible for include:

- child care assistance associated with the job opportunities and basic skills training (jobs) program that supports an AFDC recipient's efforts to work toward self-sufficiency;

- transitional child care, designed to ease the transition from welfare to work by providing up to 12 months of child care benefits for AFDC recipients that leave the rolls due to increased income as a result of employment;

- at-risk child care, that helps low-income working parents in their efforts to support their families by offsetting the cost of child care;
- the child care and development block grant, which provides financial assistance to low-income families to help them find and afford quality child care for their children.

- social services block grants (Title XX), that are used to provide child care services in 45 states currently;

- o child welfare services (Title IV-B) that allow states the option to provide child care and to assist child care centers in meeting state and local licensing requirements; and,

- o dependent care planning and development provides grants to states to pay 75% of the costs of planning and developing information and referral services, and before- and after-school care.

In addition to these child care programs, ACF is responsible for a number of programs that either directly or indirectly affect families involved in child care.

Head Start programs are now providing before and after program care at many centers. Head Start is also the basis of some promising demonstration efforts to coordinate the delivery of services to families with young children.

In addition to Head Start, Child Welfare Services, NCCAN, Foster Care and Adoption Assistance, the JOBS program, and the Administration for Developmental Disabilities. All have an interest in, and an involvement with the provision of child care.

As a single agency we have a broad perspective on the issue of child care and the ability to focus the resources we have on issues related to children and families. So child care is not an isolated issue in a single office at ACF. It's a growing aspect of a comprehensive effort to help states meet the needs of children and families.

ACF has moved quickly to implement child care programs. The four new child care programs that were established in the last three years, the at-risk child care program, transitional child care, child care for AFDC recipients, and represent about $1.4 Billion in new federal funds available this fiscal year to provide child care for low-income parents who are working or are in training or education.

I'm sure that most of you are already well informed about the child care and development block grant, or, CCDBG. But let me give you a status report.

Currently, 47 states and dozens of indian tribes are already running CCDBG programs. This means that over $700 million of new federal funds are already working to pay for child care, early childhood development, before- and after-school programs, and quality improvement activities. An additional $825 million will become available on september 30th of this year.

The interim final rule for CCDBG is in place, and we hope to publish a final rule in the next few months. NACCRRA made several thoughtful and significant comments regarding the interim final rule, and we will consider these comments carefully as we prepare the final rule. Although we may have differences, I'm pleased we share a commitment on the fundamental issue: parents must have the right to choose their child care provider.

As the working mother of a 3 year old, I know first hand the anxiety and stress involved in exercising parental choice in child care decisions. Weighing the benefits and drawbacks of each option and settling on the one choice for my son wasn't easy. But I made a choice that suited my family's needs and priorities.

Some have suggested that there is a conflict between parental choice and the health and safety of children. They imply, and sometimes they actually say, that parental choice itself could lead to unsafe choices. We think this is the exception, not the rule. And, it makes little sense to constrain the moral and legal rights of all parents because a few make unwise choices. The key is helping parents make informed choices that will be beneficial for themselves and their families.

Our child care regulations require that states have health and safety standards, registration, and other licensing and

regulatory requirements in place. Within this structure, however, we hold firm to the belief that parents must retain the right to choose their caregiver. Nobody is in a better position than a parent to make this important decision.

This may seem obvious to you and me but there are those who believe that government agencies are in a better position to make family decision. I know for a fact that most people who work for the government, like most parents and like most Americans, are industrious and well-intentioned. The point, however, is that the government should not substitute its judgement for the judgement of the parent. The presumption should not be that government can make better decisions for children than their own parents.

Columnist William Raspberry, who writes often on family issues has said that much of our modern culture serves to undermine the family. "It is the family" he reminds us, "and not the government that has emerged across cultures and millennia as the indispensable institution for the development of competence and character in children. Secretary Sullivan often expresses the same sentiment when he says that the family is the first and best Department of Health and Human Services. And that's the way it should remain. Government has a responsibility in family issues. But that responsibility is to support, encourage, and assist -- not replace -- the family.

One of the responsibilities of government is to help families afford child care; and we're doing that. Another responsibility we have is to increase the availability of child care by providing additional funds; and we're doing that too. Government has a responsibility to ensure the health and safety of our children. And in the CCDBG legislatiOn, congress vested the primary responsibility for setting standards and monitoring requirements with the State and local government.

Finally, government has a responsibility to increase access to child care and to help families understand, and evaluate all of their options, and we're doing that by funding consumer information and resource and referral efforts, and mandating parental access to providers.

Many states are using the 25% of their CCDBG grant to fund and to increase resource and referral agencies. And in some instances like California, resource and referral agencies are used to run the certificate portion or other components of a state program.

Yes, CCDBG means there is money available to do all these things. And at ACF we are committed to getting the money out as soon as we can and making these programs really work for families. Because families are still at the heart of our efforts. And it's the context of families that parental responsibility and parental choice move from being "good ideas" to realities.

We will not reduce the burden of parental responsibility by taking choices away from parents. Instead, we will work to provide parents with the support they need to be effective family decision makers in an age of information overload.

Parents must remain in charge of family decisions. And, as pioneers in the new frontier of child care we share the opportunity and the responsibility to truly assist parents in these decisions. I appreciate your part in that effort and I'm confident that together we can help make parental choice an informed, responsible choice.